

## OVERVIEW OF NORTH LITTLE ROCK HISTORY

North Little Rock's early history was a struggle for identity. The area was referred to as "Opposite Little Rock" on early maps. In 1845 an army officer named Richard DeCantillon Collins, who surveyed roads and rivers in Arkansas for the government, registered eight square blocks for sale on the north bank of the Arkansas River. The first name given to the area was DeCantillon.

Another early settlement in the area called Huntersville, is believed to have been named for army Captain R. L. Hunter who surveyed a route for the Little Rock-Fort Smith Railroad. The first rail route actually built in Arkansas was the Memphis and Little Rock Railroad. Completed in 1862, the railroad ended at a depot on the north river bank "opposite Little Rock" from where passengers were ferried across the river to Little Rock. Another development the north side of the river, though not as well known as DeCantillon or Huntersville, was the town of Quapaw. In 1865 Arkansas Gazette founder and publisher William E. Woodruff advertised riverfront lots adjacent to "Huntersville", but there is no evidence of any deeds recorded.

In 1866 the town of Argenta was surveyed and platted. The name Argenta referred to the silver mines north of the town site. Although a post office was established in Argenta, Arkansas in 1871, the town had not incorporated. The completion of the Baring Cross bridge across the Arkansas River just to the west of downtown Argenta in 1873, connected the north side town with Little Rock and the southwest and heralded the beginning of a long period of growth for Argenta. By the late 1870s Argenta was a major railroad line crossing. As the railway related shops, warehouses, and workforce increased, so did the town of Argenta.

It was common for a large portion of railway labor to be migratory and large number of these "boomers" as they were called, passed through Argenta. The railroad people who settled in one place were called "homeguards". With a rapidly growing population and little organized means of enforcing law, the disorderliness of the town inspired an article in the Arkansas Gazette in December, 1880 encouraging the town of Argenta to incorporate for the purpose of obtaining control of the "lawless conditions".

In 1890 an incorporation petition was filed to establish Argenta as a city. The Little Rock City attorney advised the City Council that the boundaries of the cities of Little Rock and Argenta extended to the middle of the Arkansas River between them and therefore considered Argenta contiguous to Little Rock. In an election in April 1890, Little Rock voters decided to annex lands "contiguous" to their city. Argenta was made the eighth

ward of the city of Little Rock. Argenta businessmen challenged the legality of the election in the Supreme Court of Arkansas, but it was affirmed that the annexation was legal.

At the time of its annexation to Little Rock, Argenta was still considered a "rough" town. Argenta was "off limits" even to soldiers stationed at nearby Fort Roots Military Base. Saloons and gambling houses filled the buildings along Argenta's primary street, Newton Avenue (later changed to Main Street). There were plank sidewalks, no paved streets or water system, a small police force, and only bucket-brigade fire protection. Low-lying streets often flooded, leaving Argenta a muddy, mosquito infested area. Although a "free" wooden bridge was constructed across the Arkansas River in the late 1890s, little improvements were made in Little Rock's Eighth Ward.

The name Faucette is synonymous with the history of North Little Rock. Brothers William C. and James P. Faucette were foresighted businessmen who played a significant role in the independence and development of Argenta/North Little Rock. Both men were "homeguards" (resident railroad employees) who had lived in Argenta since 1878. As an early business venture, the Faucette brothers operated a boarding house at 400 Main Street, which catered to railroad workers. Later they bought land in downtown Argenta and built a private electric light plant and started a bank that was later to become Twin City Bank.

As one of the first aldermen elected from the Eighth Ward of Little Rock, William Faucette pushed for improvements in the swampy Eighth Ward. In 1901 a group of men from the Eighth Ward led by the Faucette brothers secretly organized for the purpose of separating Argenta from Little Rock. In 1901 an area immediately north of the Argenta town site (what is roughly today 15th street on the south, 23rd on the north, Main Street on the east and the railroad tracks on the west) was incorporated as the "Town of North Little Rock". The Faucette brothers paid the filing fee for the incorporation of North Little Rock.

The group from the Eighth Ward then manipulated a bill through the Arkansas Thirty-fourth General Assembly in 1903. Prepared by state senator James P. Clarke, this bill was written to permit the annexation or consolidation of one municipal corporation located within one mile of any other municipal corporation. The act was called the "Hoxie-Walnut Ridge Bill" and the men from the Eighth Ward paid a lobbyist from Walnut Ridge to ascertain its passage. There was little attention paid to this piece of legislation by the General Assembly as it was thought to have been a special interest bill written to permit the cities of Hoxie and Walnut Ridge in the northeastern part of the state to consolidate. The Hoxie-Walnut Ridge Bill as signed into law in March 1903. On May 1, 1903, the day after the legislature adjourned, William C. Faucette announced that he had a petition

signed by Argenta property owners asking to be annexed to the incorporated town of North Little Rock under the provisions of the Hoxie-Walnut Ridge Bill. A special election was held in July 1903 and the citizens of Argenta voted to secede from Little Rock and become part of the incorporated town of North Little Rock.

The annexation of Argenta by North Little Rock was in dispute in the courts for over a year, but in February, 1904 the Arkansas Supreme Court decided in favor of the North Little Rock-Argenta annexation. William Faucette was elected mayor in the city's first general election. With a population of 6,500 and an established city government, North Little Rock became a city of the first class. City improvement districts were established which included paving streets and installing a drainage system. Manufacturing and railroad business expanded and the city began to flourish.

On October 26, 1905 President Theodore Roosevelt visited the city and gave a short speech at the City Park (located where the NLR Post Office stands at 420 Main). It is said that Roosevelt remarked "Mr. Faucette, I am delighted to meet the mayor of Argenta". As a result, in January 1906, a city ordinance was passed changing the name of the city to Argenta.

Argenta experienced an economic boom in the first two decades of the 20th century. Four railroads were located in the city. Cotton oil mills and the lumber industry provided a strong economic base for growth. Baring Cross, a town located about a mile west of Argenta and populated by railroad families, was annexed in 1904 and the city spread east, taking in farmland along its boundaries. The Faucette brothers were the forces behind construction of a new city hall building at 300 Main Street in 1914 which remains an outstanding architectural and governmental anchor in the downtown commercial district.

The name remained Argenta until 1917 when it was changed to North Little Rock and has remained as such since. James P. Faucette fostered the 1917 name change to North Little Rock after a trip to California where he saw the economic benefits to a small town close to Hollywood after changing its name to "West Hollywood". Faucette was convinced that changing the name of Argenta to North Little Rock would be a financial boost to the city.

In 1923 the Broadway Bridge over the Arkansas River was dedicated. The "free bridge", built in the 1890s, was replaced in 1924 by the Main Street bridge. Replacement of a dangerous wood viaduct over the railroad tracks at 9th and Main Streets by a new concrete viaduct in 1927 accessed the areas north of downtown for further development. A streetcar system existed in the downtown and the city was in such good financial condition that a banner was placed on the eastern edge of town reading on one side "Locate in North Little Rock, A City Without

Indebtedness" and "Welcome to North Little Rock, The Industrial City of Arkansas" on the other side.

North Little Rock's first suburban neighborhood, Park Hill, was opened in 1922. The Old Mill was built by the developers of Park Hill in 1933 as a tourist attraction and was featured in the opening scene of "Gone With the Wind".

Even during the tumultuous years of World War II, the north side saw extensive growth, largely due to the need for housing for soldiers stationed at nearby Camp Robinson. In 1946 the town of Levy, the Rose City area, and Park Hill were annexed to the city of North Little Rock.

The 1950s and 1960s were years of change for the city. It was during this period that 1,500 wooded acres were donated to the city to become Burns Park. The Urban Renewal program changed the face of the city, leaving many blocks of vacant land, but also developing a civic center with library, community building, police and courts building and post office in a former blighted neighborhood. North Little Rock's first hospital, Memorial Hospital was opened in 1961.

Millions of dollars were spent in the 1970s to fund urgently needed drainage and street improvement projects. Memorial Hospital underwent a huge expansion, and a vital railroad underpass was built to facilitate access to the hospital. The city's first skyscraper, Twin City Bank, was built in 1974, marking the early beginning of commercial revitalization of downtown. In 1973 the state's largest shopping mall, McCain Mall, opened in North Little Rock.

In early 1980, rising electric prices caused the city to seek solutions for less expensive alternative power, and a hydroelectric plant was built to supplement future energy needs. Ambulance/paramedic medical services were dramatically improved by MEMS, a new ambulance company. Boundaries of the city expanded as land to the east and west was annexed.

An overall rise in the quality of living has predominated the 1990s and early 21st century. The city has experienced unparalleled commercial and residential growth. Revitalization of the historic Argenta neighborhood in downtown North Little Rock has earned the city national recognition. Riverfront park development and a renovation of Main Street to its historic appearance have combined with construction of the ALLTEL Arena to be the catalysts for further downtown reinvestment. Construction of a new facility for Baptist Memorial Hospital near the junction of Interstate-40 and Highway 167 has provided medical services for a wide range of central Arkansas.

The city of North Little Rock has an active History Commission, which is located in the historic Park Hill Water Company Building at 3427 Magnolia in the Park Hill neighborhood. The Commission is always looking for more information, more photographs, maps, etc. to tell the story of North Little Rock. For more information on the history of North Little Rock call the History Commission at (501)758-7585.